

CHAPTER X

THE FELLAH AND PROGRESS

In the great square in front of Cairo station stands a massive group of statuary hewn from Aswan granite. It represents the Sphinx rising on its forefeet, with a woman standing beside it, her hand on the nape of its neck, and her veil raised. This is *The Reawakening of Egypt*, by an Egyptian sculptor, Mukhtar.

During the last half century Egypt has made more progress than any other Near Eastern or Islamic country. Politically she has become independent first of Turkey and then of England, and established herself as a sovereign State. This evolution has been made possible by the birth and growth in a whole class of the idea of nationality and a consciousness of the destiny of the Egyptian nation. Since 1923 the Kingdom of Egypt has had Ambassadors and Consuls abroad, a purely Egyptian Government, a parliamentary life and an opposition, universal suffrage and political parties with electoral programmes, ministries and a more and more specialised civil service — in short the whole paraphernalia of a modern state.

Nevertheless this political life affects only a tenth of the total population. The fellahen, who constitute the remaining nine-tenths of passive and unorganised citizens, take no more part in it now than formerly, when Turks or English ruled the country.

They are either ignorant of the existence of all these new ideas we have just mentioned, or they have no understanding of them. They are Wafdists if you like — that is to say, members of the Nationalist Party — in the sense that the *Omda* or the political agents have written their names in the party lists, but they are neither active members nor even supporters in the way Russian peasants would be, for example. No-one has taught them their rights and privileges. Demo-

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184 cratic forms can never have been so misleading. But
665 that is not the worst evil, as we shall see.

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652 The economic progress of Egypt is as striking as its
439 political development. The country's financial prosperity
651 is remarkable. Even before the war the State had a gold
reserve of thirty million pounds, and between 1925 and 1935
it almost doubled. The budget never shows a deficit. The
constant increase of revenues from the Customs and the
railways, the capital of the limited companies, both foreign
and Egyptian, the development of local industry (the Bank
Misr companies employ 200,000 men), the place of Egyptian
cotton on the world's market, the improved quality of the
crops, the systematic extension of perennial irrigation and
therefore of agricultural production — all these are signs
of prosperity.

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178 But this progress has resulted in no increased well-
being for the fellah. His standard of life and his methods
of work have remained unchanged, for all this progress was
based on his labour. His ignorance and stagnation were the
conditions for this capitalist prosperity.

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[248 'The so-called rich crops', wrote an economist some time
249 ago, 'that is to say cotton and sugar-cane, will not fail to in-
247] fluence the evolution of the fellaheen, since the one develops
capital, which will effect an improvement in agriculture, and
the other industry, which will sharpen the fellah's wits by
the use of machinery.'

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511 In fact, neither capital nor industry has helped the
fellaheen. Both before and after the boom of 1920 their
financial affairs were as bad and their poverty as great as a
hundred or a thousand years ago. There are even signs, and
that in official reports (''), of a lowering of the standard of
living. It is the fashion to attribute this to the increase
in the population, though 'Aly Shamsy Pasha also cites
'the unequal distribution of agricultural wealth' (''). In the
midst of this poverty in prosperity there are still landowners
whose incomes are L.E. 12,000 to L.E. 15,000 a year.

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183 Yet here again the evil must not be exaggerated. There
may be something worse than poverty — ignorance.

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873 The intellectual revival of Egypt has been dazzling.
Under the reign of Fuad I especially, learned institutions
were multiplied. The Fuad I University, which did not
exist twenty-five years ago, has today nearly 10,000 students,